

Ambassador Olson  
Remarks at the Inaugural Session of the Fulbright and Humphrey Alumni Conference  
November 9, 2012  
Higher Education Commission  
*As Prepared*

AssalamuAlaikum. Good afternoon

Thank you Dr. Javed Laghari, Chairman of the Higher Education Commission for your thoughtful remarks. I'd also like to acknowledge all of the distinguished academics in the room, as well as the Board of Directors of the U.S. Educational Foundation in Pakistan and the Executive Director Rita Akhtar and her staff. I'm honored to be here to help open the 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Pakistan Fulbright and Humphrey Alumni Conference.

You have chosen as the theme of this year's conference "Building a Tolerant Society Together." How timely and courageous for this group to take on such a sensitive, yet critical subject. At a time when both of our countries are struggling with the threat of extremism and the violence it causes, an open discussion about tolerance is more necessary than ever.

As alumni of educational exchange programs, you bring a unique and seasoned view to this dialogue. I'm sure all of you faced down your own fears and misconceptions when you first found yourself in a foreign culture in the United States. You were compelled to see others' point of view – and you helped colleagues in America see things from your point of view. And it's that mutual understanding – that's where tolerance starts. And once you returned to Pakistan, you used your new knowledge and experience to try to create a better Pakistan, not alone, but with all the new connections you made on your exchanges.

It's for these reasons – mutual understanding, educational advancement, and academic collaboration – that we, the United States, believe so strongly in academic exchanges and invest so much in them. Today, Pakistan has the largest Fulbright program in the world, over 120 scholarships are awarded each year. It's because we believe in the benefits that these exchanges will bring not just to individual Pakistanis, but to all of Pakistan, as well as to the mutual understanding between the United States and Pakistan.

The United States wants a stable, secure, prosperous future for Pakistan. We want to work with you, side by side, to improve economic and educational standards, tackle energy and health needs, and fight violent extremism. If we can help you create a stable, secure, prosperous Pakistan, then we have gained for ourselves a strong and confident partner. But working together requires tolerance, so I will end where I began my remarks.

If a country is to tackle its problems, it must create an environment of understanding and tolerance for all views and beliefs. And if we are to work together, that tolerance and understanding must extend to each other as real partners. I hope that your discussions over the next few days can contribute to that environment of tolerance and understanding, which is critical to the success and security of this country and of our partnership.

As the founder of the Fulbright Scholarship Program, Senator J. William Fulbright said: “In the long course of history, having people who understand your thought is much greater security than another submarine.”

Thank you.